

Some Aspects of the Church in Scottish Society in the Era of the Reformation

Illustrated from the Sherifffdom of Ayr

MARGARET H. B. SANDERSON, M.A.

THIS paper is not a direct attempt to trace the progress of the Reformation in one area, but, rather, to examine the fabric of the ecclesiastical structure which took the shock of the religious changes, to consider the personnel of the church as themselves part of the social framework and to take account of the process of secularisation which, over a period of more than a generation, made way for the more cataclysmic events of the 1550's and the revolution of 1560.

The social and ecclesiastical pattern of the three bailiaries into which the sherifffdom of Ayr was divided differed one from another.

Carrick, the most thinly populated, contained only eight of the sherifffdom's forty-three parishes. It was described in the 1560's as "a barren country except for cattle,"¹ and as a stronghold of adherence to the catholic faith. This southern, pastoral country may have bred a conservative race. There were no royal burghs to act as a reminder of authority other than that of the landed classes. The most populous areas were too far south and west for continuous contact with the communication routes between England and the political heartland of Scotland. The monopoly of social and military power lay with the earl of Cassillis and his numerous kinsmen while the only important religious institutions, apart from the parish kirks, the abbey of Crossraguel and the collegiate kirk of Maybole were part of the Kennedy hegemony.

Kyle was a contrast in many ways. It contained the two royal burghs, Irvine and Ayr and Prestwick, a burgh of barony, created for the Blairs of Adamton. There were twenty parish kirks in Kyle which was very populous, particularly along the coast and in the valleys of the rivers Irvine and Ayr. In the barony of Kylesmure belonging to Melrose abbey—the "Lollard country"—a measure of security of tenure coupled with the absence of complete domination by one family, as in Carrick, or continual rivalry between two, as in Cunningham, may have permitted a certain prosperity among the

¹ Arch. and Hist. Coll. Ayr and Wigtown. Vol. 4, p. 17.

tenants. With the exception of the monastery of Failford, which had become more or less secularised by the 1540's, none of the monasteries having lands in Kyle were "on the spot" and much authority was delegated to local lairds.

Cunningham was too small to hold the two earls, Eglinton and Glencairn, who were, literally, next-door neighbours, and throughout the sixteenth century the Cunningham/Montgomery feud defied all attempts to settle it. This state of affairs was aggravated in the 1540's and 1550's by the flood of Hamilton influence which penetrated the bailiary as a result of the holding of the benefice of Kilwinning abbey by two members of the Hamilton family. Nevertheless, the nature of that abbey's teinds suggests good agricultural land by contemporary standards. There was a particularly heavy concentration of population in the crescent between Ardrossan and Dreghorn. Cunningham had fifteen parish kirks.

I have chosen three contexts in which to look at the relations of church and society in Ayrshire in the period just before the Reformation.

Firstly, the pattern of landholding and tenancy on the church estates, paying particular attention to the effects of feuing; secondly, the efficiency of the parish system and the contact between clergy and people; and, lastly, the circumstances surrounding the change-over of 1560.

THE ECCLESIASTICAL TENANTS

There are signs that the ecclesiastical baronies of central and north Ayrshire were very highly populated. From surviving Kilwinning records, which include the chamberlain's accounts for the 1560's,¹ there emerges a picture of land which was broken up into remarkably small holdings. Continuity of tenure on the Kilwinning estates is suggested by the fairly frequent mention of nineteen year leases, some of which were converted into feus, and by the appearance of rentallers.²

That part of the Paisley rental which records the entry of tenants between the years 1525 and 1555 suggests the same pattern of small holdings and continuity of tenure on the barony of Monkton in Kyle.³ About 64% of the new tenants in that thirty-year period bore the same surname as the previous

¹ Transcript in S.R.O. (GD 103/2/22). Original in possession of Irvine town council. (Cited hereafter as Kilwinning rental).

² Agreement of 1536 speaks of "settand . . . to the nerrest of kin and kyndliest that hes the lands . . . in assedatioun or rentale". (A.D.C., Vol. 8, f. 155). Mention in 1533/4 of the "lovable custom" of the abbey that "tennentis havand takkis . . . be rentalling in thar rentale . . . sall bruik thair malingis for lyfetymes . . . quilk is unbrokin as yit". (Ibid., Vol. 4, f. 2).

³ J. C. Lees 'Paisley abbey', appendix. (Cited as Paisley rental).

holder or were said to be related to him. The tenants of Monkton were still paying a mixture of money rents and payments in kind and were subject to a number of services. The resentment of "arriage and carriage" must have been pretty strong in this part of the country where the commutation of one long carriage between Monkton and Paisley was the rather hefty sum of 10s.

In cases where land at Monkton was not apparently inherited half of the dispositions went to lairds, the majority of whom were Hamiltons. The way in which the abbot, archbishop John Hamilton, used his patronage to the advantage of his kinsmen must have done little to endear him to the "gentlemen of Kyle."

The designation "kindly tenant" was applied not only to the humble "tillers of the ground" but to lairds whose forbears had long occupied kirklands. The widespread outcry in sixteenth century Scotland against the violation of the rights of kindly tenants seems to express the belief that the hereditary principle was all-important in the transfer of property.

In the middle ages when the church had been, on the whole, a lenient landlord the kindly tenants may have been comparatively safe but the coming of the lay commendators gave a different character to ecclesiastical land-ownership by transforming the regalities into the estates of politically dominant families, creating a situation in which the smaller tenants no longer felt secure. The acceleration of the feuing movement on kirklands is often traced to the economic necessity and acquisitiveness of the superiors. The other side of the picture may have been the desire on the part of tenants to secure their possessions to their families. Those tenants with bargaining power were able to take action in the matter and sometimes got the best of the feuing bargain.

On the other hand, a commendator whose attitude was essentially that of a landlord might bring pressure to bear on small tenants. It seems to me that when dozens of kindly tenants in the Corsehill and Brigend districts of Kilwinning feued their cultivation patches¹ just on the eve of the Reformation there is more than a hint that Gavin Hamilton the commendator was out to make as much money from his estates as possible and that the tenants may have been compelled to feu.

The situation created by commendatorships affected other rights than those of tenancy of the land. In the days when an abbot was the spiritual head of a religious community the burden of business and the problem of military protection may have been handed thankfully to a powerful layman as bailie but as secularisation of the property took place it was to be expected

¹ Many of these were valued at an annual rental of 5s. and 2s. Scots.

that one landowner (i.e. the commendator) would resent the claims of another (i.e. the bailie) to a right to interfere in the running of his estates. In the 1540's abbot Alexander Hamilton of Kilwinning, who was an ecclesiastic, but had Chatelherault and others of his family behind him, refused—for a period of two years—to recognise and institute the earl of Eglinton as the abbey's bailie.¹

One way in which laymen did make a profit out of the church's difficulties was through the system of setting ecclesiastical revenues in tack. The practice is a comment on the realities of the church's situation in sixteenth century society. It illustrates the attempts of the clergy to opt out of the increasingly difficult job of collecting their own revenues. In this respect the church came into line with those secular corporations who were faced with the same problems:—the bailies who set the burgh mails in tack and the king and his chamberlain who farmed out the national tax.

That laymen did make a profit can be seen in the case of the vicarage kirklands of Kilmaurs which, some time before the Reformation were let to Cunningham of Robertland for a smaller amount than the vicar should have received from the petty kirk dues.² At the same time all the other kirklands of Kilmaurs were feued as early as 1506 to Cunningham of Craighs for the minute sum of 6s 8d.³ We can easily see in whose hands the kirk's patrimony lay in the earl of Glencairn's barony long before the Reformation parliament was thought of.

An important result of this system, in Ayrshire as elsewhere, was that by the middle of the sixteenth century the majority of the parochial revenues, parsonage and vicarage alike, were leased, usually to local tacksmen. In other words, many of the clergy who held parochial benefices were living partly on salaries. The amount of pluralism and non-residence that existed made the tacksman almost inevitable. The tacksman who was also the local laird was better able to extract the teinds from the parishioners than the parson of a south Ayrshire parish who spent most of his time in the high kirk of Glasgow, or, as one of them did, in the cathedral of Dunblane!

The basic difference between the "lang tack" and the feu lay in the hereditary nature of the latter and it is not surprising that many tacksmen became feuars. A fixed tack duty became increasingly unrealistic as the sixteenth century advanced with its increase in land value and rise in prices. Hence,

¹ Inventory of Eglinton Muniments. (S.R.O.; 2/80/11; 2/80/17; 2/80/18; 2/80/19; 2/80/20). (Cited hereafter as Eglinton).

² Chalmers "Caledonia." Vol. 6, p. 138. (Since only Vol. 6 of this work has been consulted, it will be cited hereafter as Chalmers).

³ Register of Kelso, Vol. 2, pp. 429-30.

after the Reformation, we find numbers of the beneficed clergy feuing kirklands which had been previously set in tack in an attempt to narrow the gap between their incomes and the cost of living, though in time the feu duty was to become itself unrealistic.

First encouraged by the crown in mid-fifteenth century the expansion of the feuing movement co-incided with the economic requirements of the clergy who were being heavily taxed by both crown and Roman curia in the first half of the sixteenth century, with the social uncertainty which accompanied the years of war with England and the growth of the Reform movement and with the emergence of a certain self-consciousness on the part of those called "barons and gentlemen" who were seeking, among other things, increased security of possession.

Out of a total of some 2,800 feu charters of kirklands which I have collected to date, slightly over one seventh relate to lands in Ayrshire. The earliest Ayrshire charter which I have found dates from 1527. This is later than in some other parts of the country. There is clear evidence, for instance, that feuing was underway in the latter half of the fifteenth century on the regalities of Arbroath, Dunfermline and Paisley and on the episcopal baronies of Moray, Glasgow and St. Andrews.

Systematic feuing in Kylesmure began in the 1550's feus going mainly to the large number of kindly tenants in this part of the upper Ayr valley.¹ After the Reformation grants in Kylesmure went to more substantial tenants such as Campbell of Kinzeancleuch, Chalmers of Gadgirth, Cunningham of Caprington and Campbell of Loudoun. In the 1570's and 1580's there was another "bulge" of Melrose charters.

The pattern in Cunningham is similar to that in Kylesmure. Eleven Kilwinning charters date from before 1549. With the appointment to the commendatorship of Gavin Hamilton in 1551 the number of feu charters rises rapidly, including eighty between 1557 and 1560. The fall of the Hamiltons at the end of the civil war and the death of Gavin Hamilton in 1571 caused a sort of by-election in the local politics of Cunningham, the commendatorship of Kilwinning going to a son of Glencairn. Almost all the feu charters granted after 1573 by Alexander Cunningham merely convey to Cunninghams lands which had previously been held by Hamiltons and are not concerned with the possessions of smaller tenants.

The meagre number of feu charters relating to Paisley Abbey's lands in Kyle hardly amount to a feuing movement at all.

¹ Morton Papers (S.R.O.), GD 150, Box 54; an incomplete document dated 4 May 1555 records the original agreement between the commendator of Melrose and the kindly tenants of Kylesmure. See also, Melrose Regality Records (S.H.S.), Vol. 3, p. 166.

The situation in south Ayrshire differed entirely from that in the north. Only sixteen of all the Melrose charters (there are over 120 of them) relate to the barony of Monkland in Carrick, only three dating from before 1560. Of the seventeen Crossraguel charters the earliest belongs to 1565. There was virtually no feuing of the regality until the arrival of the post-Reformation commendator, Alan Stewart, challenged the hold of the Kennedys on the abbey lands.

Of the parish kirklands, only those of Kilmaurs, Stewarton and Dreghorn, in the area particularly dominated by Glencairn, were feued before 1560.¹

Who were the feuars?

Apart from four noblemen, Chatelherault, Cassillis, Glencairn and the master of Eglinton, there were seventy-nine lairds, that is, men designated "John X of Y", who were substantial landholders long before they became feuars; for example, Cunningham of Caprington, Kennedy of Bargany and Wallace of Craigie.

Charters were granted to fifty-nine smaller tenants usually designated "John X in Y" many of whom were able to build up considerable estates on the basis of their feu charters. An example of these is Thomas Nevin in Monkredding in the parish of Kilwinning who got his feu charter of easter Monkredding in 1539,² a grant of the neighbouring territories in 1543³ and whose son eventually built a tower house on his estates.

Perhaps the most interesting feuars are the eighty or so who are named but are not given any territorial designation. A considerable number of these may have been pretty humble people.

Much ecclesiastical property returned by means of feuing to patrons, to the contemporary representative of a founding family or to the most influential local laird. The temporalities of the Trinitarian house of Failford went to the Cunninghams in the 1540's,⁴ those of the collegiate kirk at Kilmaurs also went to the Cunninghams⁵ and those of Maybole to the Kennedys.⁶

¹ Register of Kelso, Vol. 2, pp. 429-30 (Kilmaurs), Eglinton 1/70/4; R.S.S., Vol. 53, f. 30 (Stewarton), Eglinton 1/18/1 (Dreghorn).

² R.M.S., 3:3245.

³ Ibid.

⁴ GD 86/137 (S.R.O.).

⁵ Glencairn Muniments (S.R.O.), GD 39/257/5, pp. 26-7, R.M.S., 4:2221;2547.

⁶ Crossraguel charters, Vol. 1, p. 70-1. (Pub. Hist. Coll. Ayr).

The lands of the chapel of our Lady of Kyle returned to the patrons, the Blairs of Adamton, about 1560,¹ the kirklands of Ardrossan to the vicar's nephew,² those of Dalry to a member of the Blair family,³ Dreghorn to Mowat of Busby,⁴ those of the chapel of St. Ninian at Dundonald to Wallace of Craigie in 1543,⁵ Dunlop to Cunningham of Aiket,⁶ Girvan to Cathcart of Carleton,⁷ Kilbirnie to a relative of the perpetual vicar,⁸ West Kilbride to the vicar's nephew,⁹ Ochiltree to Lord Ochiltree,¹⁰ Pearston to Barclay of Pearston¹¹ and Stevenston to Campbell of Stevenston.¹² The lands of the Carmelite friary at Irvine returned to the founding family, the Fullertons.¹³

How democratic was feuing, if we may use an anachronism?

On the Melrose lands in Kylesmure and Carrick 53 % of the lands went to the "sitting tenants". On Kilwinning regality grants to occupants account for just over 46 %. It seems safe to say that if the feu is reasonably small it has a fair chance of going to the sitting tenants but that where lands are being feued in entirety these are more likely to go to an "outsider" or at least to someone with social and financial pressure behind him.

There seems to have been no rule whatever in the fixing of feu duties in relation to the rental, a matter which must have depended on local and individual conditions and on the bargaining acumen of the parties concerned. As to the increase in value of land after feuing—and here I can speak only generally as I have not gone into the matter thoroughly yet—it would appear that, whereas influential people got comparatively favourable terms from the commendators of both Melrose and Kilwinning, the smaller tenants of Kylesmure paid much higher feu duties in relation to the "old rent," as it was called, than did the small tenants of Cunningham. The lands in Kylesmure for which feu charters exist would appear to have trebled in value as a result of feuing but those on the regality of Kilwinning show a much smaller increase in value.

¹ R.S.S., Vol. 51, f. 73.

² Abbreviates of feu charters of kirklands (S.R.O.), Vol. 2, f. 299. (Cited as Reg. Feu charters).

³ Reg. Feu charters, Vol. 1, f. 191.

⁴ Eglinton, 1/18/1; Reg. Feu charters, Vol. 2, f. 210.

⁵ R.S.S., Vol. 3; 254 (printed).

⁶ Reg. Feu charters, Vol. 1, f. 67.

⁷ R.M.S., 5; 276.

⁸ Crawford priory writs, GD 20/534 (S.R.O.).

⁹ Reg. Feu charters, Vol. 2, f. 160.

¹⁰ Ibid., 1. f. 277.

¹¹ R.S.S., Vol. 52, f. 168v.

¹² R.M.S., 4; 2802.

¹³ Gillespie, J. "Dundonald parish," Vol. 2, p. 161.

About 57% of the Kilwinning charters in which feu duties are given stipulate payment entirely in money. On the barony of Crossraguel the percentage of money payments is even higher—69%. On the barony of Kylesmure a very high proportion indeed of the feu duties were required to be paid in money. The absence of a substantial body of discharges, or receipts—although I have come across some stray examples—leaves open the question as to whether the money demanded by the superiors was ever handed over or whether, in fact, payment was made in kind to the value of the amount laid down. The demand for money payments is not necessarily proof of prosperity among the tenants, but may merely have been the method of payment which commended itself most to absentee superiors.

Changes in the holding of land, then, affected all classes. If the commendatorships benefited the noble houses it was the lairds and the “barons” and “gentlemen” who got the lion’s share as a result of feuing. Men like Thomas Nevin of Monkredding, distinct, on the one hand, from the medieval baronage—such as the Blairs of Blair—and, on the other, from those lairds who were drawn from the lower reaches of the noble houses—such as Cunningham of Caprington—were to be the “new rich” of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries largely because they became feuars of kirklands.

Of the smaller tenants many were able to feu their lands, however small, but there is ample evidence in the records that many of them suffered hardship and uncertainty as lands were amalgamated or subdivided and “feued over their heads” to those who could afford it.

THE PARISH SYSTEM

Having seen something of what was happening to the church’s tenants we can now look at the framework within which the church made spiritual contact with the people, the parish system.

The distribution of the Ayrshire parishes reflected that of population which was greatest in southern Cunningham and north-west Kyle. Some kirks such as Dreghorn and Pearston, Kilmarnock and Riccarton and Monkton and Prestwick stood only about two to three miles apart. Both in the heavily populated areas and in the more extensive parishes of the south and east a number of chapels were used for parochial purposes, two of these on the river Ayr, east of Mauchline, became the parishes of Sorn and Muirkirk in the seventeenth century.

All the Ayrshire kirks were appropriated, some of them to more than one religious house.¹ The revenues of Alloway, Coylton and Dalrymple, for

¹ On the subject of “appropriation”, Dr I. B. Cowan’s “Parishes of medieval Scotland” is invaluable (pub. S.R.S.).

instance, were divided between Glasgow cathedral and the chapel royal, those of Maybole between the nunnery of North Berwick and the collegiate kirk of Our Lady and S. Anne in Glasgow. The parish of Tarbolton, one of the "fat prebends" of Glasgow referred to by John Major, is an example of the combined evils of appropriation, pluralism and non-residence which were a negation of all that the parish ministry was meant to be. The holder at the Reformation who held both the parsonage and vicarage was Mr James Chisholm, archdeacon of Dunblane, who leased his benefice for £160, gave just over £7 to the chaplain who occupied his stall in Glasgow cathedral and £20 to the curate of Tarbolton.¹

The pre-Reformation church has sometimes been called a "churchman's church"; perhaps a more accurate term would be "a curate's church". In criticising the parish clergy of the sixteenth century for neglect of their duties we must surely distinguish between those beneficed clergy who may rarely have seen their parishes and the curates on whom fell the burden of the parish service.

The designation "curate" is often used merely to denote that a man was in actual charge of the cure and in that sense the term could be applied to some of the beneficed clergy. At Dalry, for instance, Mr John Rankin is called "vicar-pensioner" and "curate".² In 1558 sir Robert Leggat appears as curate and vicar of Ayr.³

Nevertheless, of the 43 Ayrshire parishes 11 were what I shall call "curate charges", that is, where the kirk was appropriated to a monastery and the cure was served by a chaplain or removeable priest. Some of these men may have served in more than one parish, either concurrently or by being moved around. Sir David Neill, acting frequently in the Largs district in the 1530's and 1540's⁴ and possibly serving in that parish, is found as curate of Monkton in 1556.⁵ Both kirks belonged to Paisley Abbey and Neill later became exhorter at Largs.

In addition to those curates who were officially in sole charge I have found record of curates acting as deputies or assistants in seventeen other parishes. The measure of their responsibility would depend on whether the vicar was temporarily or permanently non-resident.⁶ As deputies, curates, again, may

¹ Chalmers, pp. 515-6.

² Reg. Feu charters, Vol. 1, f. 191; Boyd Papers (S.R.O.), GD 8/163.

³ Ayr Burgh Court Book (S.R.O.), B6/12/3, f. 32v.

⁴ Kelburn writs (S.R.O.), 16, 17, 24: Hunter of Hunterston papers (S.R.O.), GD 102/1/23, 24: Notary at Ayr 1554, R.M.S. 4; 983. Notary at Largs 1557, Kelburn writs 37.

⁵ Curate of Monkton 1556. Burgh records, Prestwick, p. 64.

⁶ Out of 16 perpetual vicars 10 were definitely non-resident, as were at least 2 vicars pensioner.

have served in more than one parish. Sir John Mitchell, curate of Irvine in 1541¹ turns up as that of Ardrossan in 1555² though, in the case of a name as common as his it is impossible to say whether these references are to the same person.

What was the average stipend of a parish priest? Payments to clergy in actual charge of Ayrshire cures vary sometimes around and sometimes more than the £13 6s 8d minimum laid down by the provincial council of 1559. The curate of Kilmaurs received £13³ and that of Dreghorn £21 though both men were paid by Mr Andrew Layng who held both vicarages. The two curates of Dundonald had £26 between them while that of Tarbolton had £20 to himself. The curates of Coylton and Dalmellington each survived on £12. A curate's stipend would be higher if he were a chaplain receiving extra-parochial income, or if he acted as a notary. Whatever it amounted to the stipend of a curate would be considerably less than that of an absentee vicar and a mere fraction of the revenues originally intended for the maintenance of the parish cure. Not only so, but one wonders how certain a curate could be of receiving a salary which the vicar had first of all to extract from the tacksman.

On occasion a definite arrangement for payment of stipend might be made on a curate's appointment. For example, in April 1523 the abbot of Paisley appointed sir William Hume curate of Auchinleck in the following terms; "we haif rentallit our servand sir William Hume . . . in the haill kirkland . . . payand yerefor yeirlie as it was wont to do and also we do ordain and maks the said sir William curate of our said kirk for all the tyme of his lyfe . . ." The value of the kirkland was to be deducted from the curate's fee.⁴ In 1524 sir Ninian Montgomery vicar of Tarbolton leased his vicarage to sir Adam Allansoun, chaplain, with the manse and glebe, for three years for a sum of money paid in advance, sir Adam promising to serve the cure during that period.⁵ The curate of Kilwinning besides being a chaplain in the abbey kirk, held the vicarage of Kilmacormock in Knapdale which was appropriated to the monastery.⁶

There was always the possibility of promotion for the lesser clergy. Sir

¹ Blair papers (S.R.O.), GD 167/71/1.

² Eglington 1/1/3.

³ Information on curates' stipends from Chalmers, Vol. 6, section on Ayrshire parishes, *passim*.

⁴ Paisley rental, p. cxviii.

⁵ Protocol book of Gavin Ros, no. 705 (S.R.S.).

⁶ R.M.S., 3; 3245.

Richard Millar was successively a chaplain in S. John's kirk at Ayr and curate of the parish.¹ Sir Adam Allansoun whom we have just seen acting as curate of Tarbolton became vicar there. Sir Robert Leggat vicar of Ayr at the Reformation had previously been curate of Prestwick.² The vicars of Ardrossan, Girvan, Pearston, Irvine, Symington, Kilmaurs and Stevenston all make their first appearance in the records as chaplains. The beneficed parish clergy were drawn mainly from the families of the lairds and cadet branches of the noble houses. The vicarage of Stewarton which passed from father to son in the 1520's³ was held—with only a short intermission—by five successive members of the Montgomery family covering most of the sixteenth century. It seems likely that a number of the lesser clergy came from local families who were in no way influential. This was possibly true in the case of sir Robert Leggat curate of Prestwick, sir David Neill curate of Monkton, John Wylie preceptor of the chapel of our Lady of Kyle, also near Monkton, Robert Burne the prior of the Irvine Carmelites and some of the monks of Kilwinning.

The clergy were thoroughly involved in everyday life. Clerics were expected to advance the interests of their kinsmen, took part in their quarrels, occasionally in their crimes, drew up their legal business, became sureties for their debts, inherited their property and burgess-ships, and were made guardians of their children, goods, money and valuables. Land was leased and feued to the clergy as well as to the laity and some of them even engaged in trade.

In some ways the clergy were treated only as members of the society with which they increasingly identified themselves. When Lord Boyd's officers removed some tenants from land at Dundonald to which Boyd laid claim sir George Mure, chaplain, was one of those "removit furth."⁴ In 1536 Mr Matthew Montgomery fell a victim of the Cunningham/Montgomery feud, murdered by a relative of Glencairn.⁵

Anticlericalism, no new phenomenon, took on a special significance against the background of the Reform movement. Acts of violence aimed specifically at the church as a religious institution became increasingly common in Ayrshire as the century advanced. When George Wishart came to Kyle in 1544 certain lairds attempted to erect Protestant worship by forcibly

¹ McKenzie, A., "An ancient church," pp. 42-3.

² He may have held these charges concurrently. See Fraser charters no. 128 and Protocol book of Henry Preston no. 6.

³ R.S.S. 3: 4735. Muniments of Glasgow University, Vol. 2, p. 112.

⁴ Boyd papers, GD 8/99 (S.R.O.).

⁵ Fraser, W., Memorials of the Montgomeries, Vol. 2, p. 125.

removing the apparatus of the old faith. At Mauchline Wishart preached in the open air rather than risk a riot in the parish kirk.¹

In spite of change there was still a good deal of attachment to the conventional forms of religion. Even after the brother of the laird of Ochiltree had "cast down ane image in the kirk of Aire", burgesses continued to found obits at private altars, though the practice died out in the 1540's. There was a good deal of generosity towards the friars, even though one Ayr burgess thought fit to damage the statue of the Virgin on the Franciscans' kirk. Some of those who were on the best terms with the Irvine and Ayr friars were grandsons of the "Lollards of Kyle." The presence of a Dominican mission at Kirkoswald suggests that the friars carried their work outside the burghs.² When friar John Routh of Ayr preached in 1542 against the introduction of the scriptures in English, causing a riot, he got considerable support from the townsmen and magistrates.³ It took the visit of George Wishart to swing the pendulum of public opinion in Ayr definitely on to the side of the Reform movement.

Factors other than the spread of Protestantism were causing unrest by mid-century. The war with England cost the burgh of Ayr £280 between the years 1542 and 1547 as well as the loss of several ships for government requisition.⁴ In these years of war, hunger, plague and a sharp price-rise people were unusually irked by the demands of authority, civil and spiritual.

Just before the Reformation the religious establishment at Ayr was costing the burgh about 41% of its income.⁵ From about 1540 onwards most of the chaplains in the burgh kirk enjoyed considerable increases in their basic fees.⁶ Those of sir Alexander Ker, who had charge of the books and vestments, rose from £5 8s 8d to £13 6s 8d. Even choristers' fees rose, the greatest increase being in those of James Dalrymple, from 10 to 28 merks in nine years. In 1542 there was something very like a "wages dispute" between the bailies and the chaplains when fees were "frozen" until grievances could be discussed.⁷

Clergy complained of the non-payment of kirk dues. In May 1560 the vicar of Ayr won his case against a parishioner at the burial of whose wife he had officiated two years before and for which he had still not received his

¹ Knox, History (ed. W. Croft Dickinson), Vol. 1, pp. 61-2.

² Crossraguel charters, Vol. 1, p. 94.

³ Ayr Burgh Accounts (S.H.S.), p. 90.

⁴ Ibid., passim.

⁵ Ibid., p. lix.

⁶ Ibid., passim.

⁷ McKenzie, A., "An ancient church," p. 37.

customary fees, amounting in all to 42s 4d.¹ In 1561 the vicar of Dreghorn reported the non-payment for some time past of "cors presands, unmaist clathis and pasche fines", which had at one time accounted for a third of the vicarage.²

THE CHANGES OF 1560

In this last section I want to look at the reaction of the Ayrshire clergy to the changes around 1560 and, particularly, to notice the influences surrounding those who conformed to the new forms of religion and continued in office after the Reformation.

Before 1560 the face of a Reformed kirk was beginning to appear in the burgh of Ayr. Sir Robert Leggat was in charge of the parish and, from the evidence of the records, was sympathetic to Reformed ideas.

In the spring of 1559 the bailies began to discharge the chaplains of the burgh kirk. One of them, sir John Sinclair, tried to hold the magistrates to the letter of their contract made with him at the time of his induction in 1555. Although he had spoiled his case by non-residence, Sinclair was discharged with the liferent of his chaplainry.³ The rather pathetic case of sir Alexander Ker who had been a chaplain in St. John's for at least twenty years and who was now given £10 from the common purse "of fee and support". "he keipand the parochie kirk of the said burgh honest and clein, ringand the bellis yeirlye", illustrates the plight of unbeneficed chantry priests who faced redundancy in 1560.⁴ In May 1559 George Cochrane organist and master of the Song School resigned his post maintaining that he gave it up "not for ony opinion".⁵ His opinions, however, brought him the appointment of reader at St. Quivox.

In November of the same year John Or, schoolmaster, was appointed to read the common prayers and administer the sacraments in the absence of the minister Christopher Goodman, "quhilk salbe bot 8 or 9 dayis at the maist at ance . . . sua the said Christopher vais nocht to be oft absentand himself theifra." ⁶ The Protestant minister was denied the luxury of non-residence right from the start.

¹ Ayr Burgh Court Book (S.R.O.), B6/12/3, f. 32v.

² Chalmers, pp. 138, 549.

³ Ayr Burgh Court Book, B6/12/3, f. 16. Smith, J., "Memorabilia of Glasgow" (containing extracts from Ayr Burgh Court Book), pp. 10-14.

⁴ Ibid., p. 8.

⁵ Memorabilia of Glasgow, p. 3.

⁶ Ibid., pp. 7-8.

The departure of archbishop James Beaton from Scotland in 1560 left the secular clergy of his diocese without pressure either way as far as conformity to the new regime was concerned. Abbot Quintin Kennedy remained a convinced Catholic and most of the clergy within his sphere of influence and all the monks of his monastery adopted his conservative attitude. Gavin Hamilton of Kilwinning, who married after the Reformation, and continued his political and diplomatic career, had the reputation of being a middle-of-the-way man. His connection with Kilwinning regality after 1560, if not before, was that of an absentee landlord.

Out of a maximum of 75 clergy associated with the Ayrshire parishes I have been able to identify 47, the remainder being curates who are difficult to trace in the records. Of these 47 parochial clergy only nine conformed. Six of these were vicars; Mr James Walker perpetual vicar of Stevenston, Mr Thomas Andrew perpetual vicar of Irvine, John Howy, probably vicar pensioner of Kilmaurs, though usually described merely as "vicar", sir Robert Leggat vicar pensioner of Ayr, sir John Millar who was probably the pre-Reformation vicar of Symington and Mr Archibald Hamilton vicar of Kilbirnie. At least one, and possibly all three of the others were curates; sir David Neill curate of Monkton who became reader at Largs, sir William Allansoun reader at Dailly who is found as a chaplain there just before and after the Reformation and who may have been the priest appointed to the cure of the parish by the abbot of Crossraguel,¹ and sir John Maxwell who became reader at West Kilbride and since he was evidently in orders before 1560 may have been in charge of the parish under the non-resident vicar Mr Archibald Crawford.²

The six vicars who conformed continued to serve in the parishes with which they were already associated, except in the case of sir Robert Leggat who returned to Prestwick.³ None of the Ayrshire parsons appear to have conformed. In fact, out of the twenty-six "conformists" whom I have traced so far only those six were beneficed, parish clergy in the strict sense. Of the others three were perhaps curates, nine were chaplains, four were friars, two were monks, one a prebendary of the collegiate kirk at Maybole and the last, George Cochrane, was master of the Grammar School at Ayr.⁴

In parts of Kyle and Cunningham the influence of local lairds secured the appointment of conforming clergy to charges in the Reformed kirk. Two chaplains, Ranken Davidson and Adam Landells were among those recommended for service as readers at the General Assembly of December 1560,

¹ R.M.S. 3; 1804. R.M.S. 4; 195, 1575.

² Register of Deeds, Vol. 9, f. 97.

³ Burgh records, Prestwick, pp. 66, 71.

⁴ Though not, perhaps, in orders Cochrane had served the pre-Reformation church.

probably on the advice of the lairds from Kyle who attended the Assembly.¹ Davidson became exhorter at Galston and Loudoun; the baptismal register which he kept at Galston still survives.² Landells, who as reader, had charge of Cumnock, Auchinleck and Ochiltree, was about fifty years of age at the time of the Reformation, past the age when a man might feel like preaching, according to the provincial council of 1559, yet he took on the strenuous service of three parishes—and got married into the bargain.³

Mr James Walker, vicar of Stevenston who became minister there and sat in the General Assembly of 1562 had had a long connection as a chaplain with the household of Glencairn.⁴ He also held the parsonage of Inchcailoch of which Glencairn was the patron. It is not surprising to find that John Howy, the priest in Glencairn's own parish, conformed.

The Fullertons of Dreghorn were patrons of the Irvine Carmelite friary whose prior, Robert Burne, became reader at Dundonald and it was probably through the laird's good offices that the prior continued to draw certain revenues from the friary mill in order to supplement his stipend.⁵

It is interesting to notice that a number of the conforming clergy had connections with those known as "reforming lairds," acting as notaries for them or witnessing charters at their places of residence, suggesting that a number of these men may have been private chaplains. It was said that in the 1540's Campbell of Cessnock caused his household chaplain to read the scriptures in English to his family and servants. Sir David Curll, chaplain of the chapel of St. Katherine in Kilbarchan who became reader at Tarbolton had connections with Chalmers of Gadgirth to whose brother he feued the chapel lands, with Cunningham of Caprington and the earl of Glencairn himself.⁶ Adam Landells, who was born in Ochiltree, was associated in his pre-Reformation days with the laird of Ochiltree himself, with Glencairn and Cunningham of Cunninghamhead.⁷ It is interesting to speculate—and

¹ Calderwood, Vol. 2, p. 45. Pre-1560 reference to Davidson in R.M.S. 4; 333 and to Landells in Register House charters R.H. 6. 1538.

² The register is in the possession of the Minister and Kirk Session of Galston and, by the kindness of the former I was able to examine it. Davidson's signature appears twice in the volume thus:—"Ranken Davidsoun baptisar of the barnis, wt my hand." and "Ranken Davidsoun exhorter at the kirk of Galstoun."

³ Biographical details of Landells from notarial records in S.R.O. NP 2/1, f. 2 and in *Thirds of Benefices*, ed. G. Donaldson (S.H.S.), p. 264.

⁴ Glasgow Protocols (S.R.S.), Vol. 1, no. 103; Vol. 2, no. 300, R.M.S. 4; 940. *Acts and Decrets*, Vol. 3, f. 361.

⁵ Rentals of chaplainries belonging to friars and others (S.R.O.), Ch 8/31, f. 26v.

⁶ R.M.S. 3; 2873. GD 149/1/24 (S.R.O.). R.M.S. 4; 1600.

⁷ RH 6; 1538 (SRO). Protocol book of Henry Preston no. 43.

it can only be speculation yet—that there was a “reforming” ecclesiastical circle to correspond with that among the laity, in which it is not hard to see the earl of Glencairn with his kinsmen and following as the unifying influence.

The background of William Kirkpatrick the monk of Kilwinning who became minister there is rather different.¹ He was a member of the prominent Ayr family of Kirkpatrick who seem to have been supporters of the Reformation. His brother John, bailie and dean of guild, once took part in a deputation to the Queen Regent and accompanied the minister of Ayr to parliament in 1560.²

That William himself thought about things is suggested by the collection of books, valued at 10 merks, which he possessed at the time of his death and which he ordained to be sold and the money used to send his son William to university. He witnessed an account of the abbey chamberlain as “minister” in the spring of 1563.³ He married Alison Campbell a daughter of the laird of Stevenston and in 1568 feued some property in the abbey precincts.⁴ His monk’s portion, together with a stipend as minister of £100 and the fact that he and his wife had a pension from the commendator ensured that the Kirkpatricks were comfortably off. The minister died in 1577 leaving a net estate of over £600, more than three times as much as that left by his brother John, the merchant burghess of Ayr.⁵

Alexander Henderson the Kilwinning monk who was successively exhorter at Ardrossan and Stewarton and reader at Kilmaurs also enjoyed his portion in addition to his stipend until 1588 when it was gifted to his son David as his student’s allowance at St. Andrews university.⁶ David became the first full-time minister of Kilmaurs.

Of those parish clergy who did not take office in the Reformed kirk in Ayrshire the majority were parsons and vicars who may have spent very little time in their parishes. Some were, doubtless, too old to face the responsibilities and adjustments of a new era. The curate of Kilwinning, sir Eumonides Henrison, had been a chaplain in the abbey kirk for at least 45 years by 1557 when he was living in a house beside the king’s street of Kilwinning.⁷ Sir

¹ Biographical information about Wm. Kirkpatrick from his testament. Edinburgh Testaments, Vol. 9, f. 265. (S.R.O.) and Register of Privy Council, Vol. 3, p. 444.

² Ayr Burgh Accounts, p. 34.

³ Kilwinning rental, GD 103/2/22, p. 1.

⁴ Register of Feu charters, Vol. 2; 54.

⁵ Edinburgh Testaments. John Kirkpatrick’s registered 10 June 1577.

⁶ R.S.S., Vol. 70, f. 6.

⁷ Hist. Coll. Ayr., Vol. 1, p. 182; Henrison witnessed, in 1512, the attack on abbot William Bunch of Kilwinning by the earls of Angus and Glencairn.

William Allansoun became reader at Dailly after he had been prosecuted for saying mass at Easter 1563 and may well have remained "vicar of Bray" for the rest of his life.¹ Sir Allan Porterfield, vicar-portioner of Ardrossan, having feued the kirklands to his nephew married and went off to live in the city of Glasgow. Having acquired some lands in his native Renfrewshire he demitted the vicarage in 1569 in favour of another relative.²

Sir Robert Leggat who served continuously in the Prestwick and Ayr district from the 1520's to his death about 1570 led a busy life. He was at one time or another curate of Prestwick, vicar and curate of Ayr and clerk to the burgh court at Prestwick a post which he held for over thirty years with only a short break during which sir David Neill curate of Monkton took over for him.³ His record does much to redeem the reputation of the occasionally maligned curates who served the parishes in this difficult time of change.

A consideration of the immediately pre-Reformation church against the social and economic background prevents our thinking of it as of a monolithic structure staffed by a homogeneous body of reactionaries who were solidly opposed to those called "reformers". That churchmen and laymen, each in their own way, were preparing for some kind of crisis is fairly clear but this does not mean that laymen supported the Reformation only in order to benefit materially from the changes which accompanied its approach. People supported the religious movement for reasons which we rarely find in the records. In any case, as we have seen, men did not need to wait till 1560 to benefit at the kirk's expense.

If there was one factor more than any other—and quite apart from the religious issues—which was responsible for bringing about the disintegration of the pre-Reformation kirk as an institution it was surely the extent to which its organisation and resources had become secularised in the generation or so before 1560.

This paper has attempted—very sketchily to consider the church against this background in the place which John Knox liked to think of as "a receptacle of God's people of old."

¹ Pitcairn. Criminal trials, Vol. 1a, pp. 427-8.

² Reg. Feu charters, Vol. 2; f. 299. Glasg. Protocols, Vol. 5; 1424, and Vol. 7, no. 1937. Acts and Decrees, Vol. 57, f. 87.

³ Burgh records, Prestwick, *passim*.

NOTE:

Since preparing this paper the following reference has come to light.
(Hamilton M.SS. Box 4/72).

Witness to an instrument of sasine granted at Monkton 7 October 1557 "Sir John Wylie curate of Monkhous (sic)—probably "Monktoun". This suggests; (a) that sir David Neill who was curate there in 1556 (Records of Prestwick p. 64) had moved to another area, possibly Largs, and (b) that sir John Wylie may be identified with John Wylie preceptor of the nearby Chapel of our Lady of Kyle. Wylie became reader at Monkton and belonged to a local family (Records of Prestwick p. 67). This reference adds another curate to the list of "conformists".